



H A L I



# HALI

MALIK RAM



Sahitya Akademi

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## Part One

### L I F E

HALI was a rare example of our ancient culture . . . the last word in good manners, kind-heartedness, a reservoir of sympathy and compassion . . .

His faculty for forgiveness was so great that he would never retaliate even in the face of fierce provocation . . Critics who prided in disparaging others would shed their fangs in his presence. . . .

Even today there are a large number of scholars, eminent and successful, pious and holy, but alas, there is none like Hali.

(Dr Maulvi) Abdul Haq (1937)

### Introduction

Muslims came to the Indian sub-continent in the beginning of the eighth century of the Christian era. Their first incursion was, however, confined to Sindh and a part of the Punjab where their rule continued for quite some time. Full-fledged invasion took place towards the end of the tenth century when Mahmood of Ghazna invaded India. His aim was, however, limited; he came only to plunder and take back as much booty as possible to Afghanistan. In this he succeeded eminently. He never intended either to establish a permanent ruling line here or bring any large



areas under his sway. He was followed by Muhammad Ghauri in the twelfth century. This time Muslim rule was founded on a firmer footing. After defeating and seizing power from the local chieftains, he too returned to Afghanistan. But he left behind his lieutenants who established what the historians have called the Slave Dynasty. Qutbuddin Aibek was the first king of the Slave dynasty which dominated a good part of Northern India from 1206 to 1287. Successive dynasties ruled the country till Ibrahim Lodi, the last king of the Lodi dynasty, was defeated by Babur in what is called the First Battle of Panipat in 1526. This was the beginning of the famous Mughal Empire which came to an end in 1857 when the last of the Mughals, Bahadur Shah II, was deposed by the British and deported to Rangoon where he died in 1862.

All through the Muslim rule there was a regular influx of new immigrants from Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian regions and quite often from as far away as Turkey. Adventurers and mercenaries, divines and saints, scholars and savants, sages and religious preachers—all came to India. They were received with open arms by the Central Government, its courtiers and the provincial governors according to the qualifications the newcomers possessed or the capacity of the host to entertain them.

### **Family**

One such fortune-seeker was Khwaja Malik Ali who it is said was the son of Mirak Ali, the king of Herat in Afghanistan. He reached India in 1276. The family was descended from Abu Ayyub Ansari, a senior Companion of the Prophet of Islam. It is not known what made Khwaja Malik Ali give up the life of luxury and comfort in his native land and seek refuge in exile. This was the time when Ghiasuddin Balban (A.D. 1266-87), the last of

the Slave Dynasty, was on the throne of Delhi. Balban bestowed a *jagir* on Khwaja Malik Ali and he settled down in Panipat. As, however, gradually the authority of the Central Government waned fortunes of Malik Ali's family also declined. This downward trend continued unarrested, so much so that in the beginning of the 19th century one of his successors, in the fifteenth generation, Khwaja Izad Bakhsh was found to be living a very modest life earning a pittance hardly sufficient for himself and his family by working in a minor job in the Permit Department of the Provincial Government. Power and pelf once enjoyed by his forbears were no more. His only asset was that his ancestors had once occupied positions of power and influence.

### Early Years

Khwaja Izad Bakhsh had three children, a son, Imdad Husain, and two daughters Amat-ul-Husain and Wajih-un-Nisa. In A.D. 1837 (1253 A.H.) he was blessed with a second son, who was named Altaf Husain. This child was destined to make his mark as a great poet and *litterateur* under the *nom de plume* of Hali.

Altaf Husain's childhood was no different from that of the children of any other respectable middle-class Muslim family of the time. When he attained the age of five, he was placed under the charge of private tutors where he learnt Persian and Arabic and some religious texts. At the same time he memorised the *Quran* as well, as was the custom amongst religiously inclined families. He was hardly nine when unfortunately his father, Khwaja Izad Bakhsh, died in 1845 at the early age of 40. Thereafter Altaf Husain became a ward of his elder brother Khwaja Imdad Husain. Altaf Husain was thus deprived of the paternal care and love, and his loss was irreparable. But

we see that Imdad Husain spared no pains to bring up his younger brother with affection and a genuine sense of responsibility. Circumstances, however, did not favour him to attend any regular school and his education therefore remained haphazard and to some extent incomplete.

### **Escape to Delhi**

Common practice of the time was to marry children at an early age. Parents would arrange marriages of their young children as and when they deemed fit. In view of the immature age of the parties to wedlock the question of consulting them did not arise. Altaf Husain also fell a victim to this custom. He was not even 17, when he was married to Islam-un-Nisa, the daughter of his maternal uncle, Mir Baqir Ali. Like all dutiful and compliant children who could never dream of disobeying their elders or going against their wishes, Altaf Husain too meekly submitted to this bondage, though at heart he was not quite happy at what had happened. From the very beginning he was fond of acquiring education and knowledge and he feared that this new responsibility would place obstacles in his way. Luckily for him, his wife belonged to a well-to-do family and he did not have to work to be able to support her. But as long as he remained in Panipat, he could not pursue his studies or enlist himself in an educational institution. He could hardly escape entanglement in family affairs either, and this would naturally leave him little time to concentrate on his studies. He took stock of the situation and decided upon a drastic course. One day he left home surreptitiously without informing anybody and headed for Delhi which was at a distance of about 80 kilometers from Panipat. This happened in 1854 when he had just completed 17.

### Contemporary Delhi

Delhi of this period had an unrivalled place in the cultural life of the country. Here resided any number of outstanding personalities of different walks of life. Politically, no doubt, the Mughal Empire was crumbling to its finale which was to come very soon in 1857, but somehow like the last flicker of a dying lamp eminent poets and scholars, experts in medicine, saints and seers had established themselves in Delhi and were trying to disseminate knowledge. It was, therefore, but natural that Altaf Husain should have made Delhi his destination with a view to quenching his thirst for knowledge.

### Education

As Altaf Husain had left home clandestinely he could hardly provide himself with the wherewithal for his new life for fear of detection. How he completed the journey, nobody knows. When he reached Delhi, he was penniless and in a strange city, where he knew nobody. What arrangements he made for board and lodging at Delhi, we do not know. Necessarily this must have been a period of penury and want for him. We know only one thing for certain, and this too from a later day short essay of his own, that he joined the *madrasa* of Husain Bakhsh in the vicinity of Jama' Masjid where Maulvi Nawazish Ali was the head teacher. Besides attending classes in the said *madrasa*, he frequently went to other leading scholar-teachers also like Maulvi Faizul Hasan, Maulvi Amir Ahmad and *Shams-ul-'Ulama* Mian Nazir Husain in the city. From them he attained proficiency in Persian, Arabic and Islamic lore.

### English—A Taboo

This was the time when the old Delhi College which had

been established by the British in 1825 to impart knowledge of English and Western sciences to the children of the native elite was at its zenith. The College had classes in oriental languages as well and as an incentive to attract students gave scholarships and stipends to its pupils. Altaf Husain, if he had tried, could easily have got admission in this College. But his family background considered study and knowledge of English language anti-religious and an innovation which had to be avoided. Prejudice of the people at large can be well understood from the fact that they derisively dubbed an English institution of this type a *majhala* (seat of ignorance) instead of a *madrassa* (seat of learning). To call the Delhi College which produced such stalwarts as Master Ram Chandra, Muhammad Husain Azad, Nazir Ahmad, Zaka Ullah, Master Pearay Lal and a host of other scholars as a *majhala* (seat of ignorance) is palpably a travesty of facts. Consequently, Hali was content to equip himself with sufficient knowledge of Persian and Arabic in which were found the basic texts of his religion.

### **Return to Panipat**

He had hardly been in Delhi for a little over a year when his people, who had all the time been on the look out, got to know about his whereabouts. A member of the family came down from Panipat in 1855 and forced him to return home. Here too, he continued his studies privately and with the help of some local teachers tried to make up the loss which he had suffered on account of his not being able to attend a regular school. Simultaneously, he got himself a minor job in the office of the Collector of Hissar in order to earn his living. But this employment was short-lived as in May 1857 broke out the well-known uprising which has been termed by the British as 'Mutiny'. Delhi

was the main centre of trouble where the native army was most active in looting and arson. Very soon trouble proliferated and situation in neighbouring towns also became very unsafe. Hissar could not escape the affects of what was happening at Delhi. People dared not demur and lived under a constant threat of reprisal from the mutineers. Altaf Husain, therefore, decided to leave the town and return home.

He must have done this journey on foot. The whole countryside was afire and all sorts of rumours were rife. One lived all the time in the shadow of death. A stranger was suspect everywhere. He was looked upon with distrust and suspicion and no one would ordinarily be prepared to give him shelter at night or a meal in day time. In these circumstances, through what tribulations had young Altaf Husain to pass, one shudders to imagine. Nevertheless he somehow succeeded in reaching Panipat safely. But this unfortunate experience of severe physical strain and mental agony permanently impaired his health which remained a source of constant worry to him for the rest of his life.

### **Begins writing Poetry**

During his stay at Delhi (1854-55), he had, whenever he got an opportunity, waited upon literary figures of the time. At the time there were three leading poets of Urdu living in Delhi: Ghalib, Momin and Zauq. Musha'aras were regularly held in different parts of the city and the Red Fort. As he later told a friend, at one such gathering in the Red Fort, he heard Ghalib reciting his Urdu and Persian *ghazals*. This inspired him to try his hand at writing poetry himself.

He called on Ghalib frequently and cultivated his acquaintance. At the same time he began writing poetry in Urdu.

In keeping with tradition he assumed '*Khasta*' as his *nom de plume*. He showed some of his compositions to Ghalib to seek his opinion. Ghalib, as is well known, was a difficult person to satisfy and ordinarily he did not approve of the common run of Urdu poetry. When Altaf Husain placed before him his composition, Ghalib is reported to have remarked : "I usually do not advise anybody writing poetry but from what you have shown me, I feel that if you did not continue writing poetry you would be doing great injustice to yourself" He, however, got very little time either to write poetry himself or derive much benefit from the guidance of Ghalib. As mentioned above, he was forced to return to Panipat.

### **Panipat Days**

After returning from Hissar, he remained at home for about four years. Conditions everywhere were unsettled and life under the new dispensation was so unstable and insecure and unsafe that he could not stir out in search of employment either. This period he therefore utilised for study in association with certain scholars of Panipat. He thus attained a fairly advanced degree of knowledge in Quranic lore and Traditions of the Prophet.

Fluidity of administrative situation in Delhi in the post-1857 period also helped him indirectly. After the reoccupation of the city by the British forces in September, 1857, a reign of terror was let loose upon the local population. The slightest and however remote a hint about some one's complicity in the uprising was sufficient to expose him to the firing squad. Large number of people in order to save their lives and honour fled the city, and took refuge wherever they could find a haven. Amongst them were writers and poets as well, a few of whom took shelter in Panipat. With some of them Altaf Husain developed quite friendly

relations. Their association helped him a great deal in maturing his literary aptitude.

### **Delhi again**

Forced by circumstances, he had to stay at home. He could, all the same, ill-afford remaining idle indefinitely without supplementing the meager resources of the family by employing himself gainfully. In the meantime, his personal responsibilities too had increased considerably. He was father of two children by this time, a son and a daughter. So in 1862 he again left for Delhi, this time with the full knowledge and approval of his family. Luckily for him the following year, i.e., 1863, he met here Nawab Muhammad Mustafa Khan 'Shaifta', an influential public man of the capital and a great scholar.

### **'Shaifta'**

Shaifta came of a very important family of the metropolis. His father, Nawab Murtaza Khan was a cousin of Nawab Muhammad Khan Bangash of Farrukhabad. Murtaza Khan had played a significant role in contemporary politics. It was through his mediation and influence that a treaty of peace had been signed between Lord Lake and Maharaja Jaswant Rao Holkar. Lord Lake had been so impressed by and satisfied with his services that he conferred upon him for life a *jagir* with an annual revenue of Rs. 300,000 in the district of Gurgaon.

Murtaza Khan did not rest content with his achievements and favourable position with the British administration. In 1814 he purchased the town of Jahangirabad (District Buland Shahr in U.P.) in the name of his young son, Mustafa Khan 'Shaifta'. On the death of Murtaza Khan, the British Government resumed his life *jagir* in the Gurgaon district. In recognition, however, of the family's



past meritorious services an annuity of Rs 20,000 was granted instead. And as Jahangirabad had been purchased by Murtaza Khan out of his own resources, it was left untouched.

Mustafa Khan had received regular instruction in various branches of knowledge from reputed scholars and teachers of his time. After the death of his father he spent most of his time in Delhi. The whole atmosphere of the city was permeated with care-free pursuits of a decadent society. Literature and poetry occupied the affluent circles of society. Mustafa Khan being a member of the higher echelon could not escape the influence of his surroundings. He too began writing poetry both in Urdu and Persian. In Urdu he took *Shaifta* as his *nom de plume* and in Persian that of *Hasarati*. As long as Momin lived, he showed his compositions to him and after his death in May, 1852, he began consulting Ghalib. Most of his writings were unfortunately lost in the holocaust of 1857. Whatever could be retrieved was published long after his death in 1869 by his son Nawab Muhammad Ishaq Khan in 1916.

### **Companion to Shaifta**

Shaifta had been looking for a tutor for his young son Naqshband Khan who would not only supervise the young boy's education, but also be his own companion. When Altaf Husain met him, Shaifta immediately took a fancy to him and decided that he would be an ideal person for the purpose. For the next seven years or so Altaf Husain remained with Shaifta. This companionship of the two had a far-reaching effect on the future development of Altaf Husain's mind. So far all his studies had been with a view to becoming an expert in theological texts which would equip him to lead a religious and pious life. No

doubt he had occasionally dabbled in literary pursuits as well and written some poetry too, but his main concern had been religion. His association with Shaifita definitely changed the course of his life and career. He now changed his *nom de plume* from Khasta to Hali. This gave Urdu literature Hali the poet, Hali the biographer, Hali the critic and Hali the reformer both in poetry and society.

Shaifita used to divide his time between Delhi and Jahangirabad. But after the events of 1857 and particularly as a result of the harrowing experience he had to pass through as a result thereof, he mostly lived at Jahangirabad and his visits to the capital were far and few between. On account of his social standing, when in Delhi, he naturally moved in circles well known in the literary world. Hali benefited from his patron's literary and social position. During this period he also came closer to Ghalib who at the time was the most prominent figure in Delhi's cultural life. In fact, it was this association between the two which ultimately led Hali to write the first full-fledged biography of Ghalib.

### **Punjab Government Book Depot**

Ghalib died in February, 1869. A few months later Shaifita too passed away. Once again Hali was left without employment and means of subsistence. Luckily for him he soon got an offer from the Punjab Government Book Depot, Lahore. He was appointed as an Assistant Translator here. He had to revise the books translated from English and correct them from literary point of view. As has been mentioned earlier, Hali had had no English education whatsoever. This was the first time he got acquainted with western thought. It had a far reaching influence on his outlook. He had been brought up in the closed atmosphere of Urdu poetry which consisted mostly of

lyrics and their theme of love *ad nauseum*. Here he came to realise that there were other subjects too which could be dealt with in poetry. Besides this he had also occasion to read translations of English writers on criticism. This opened up an entirely new world to his inquisitive mind. He had so far lived in a world which in spite of its vastness was very limited in scope. Urdu poetry which was an imitation and replica of Persian poetry could hardly be used in the service of society or mankind at large. Hali who was already dissatisfied with the hollowness of Urdu poetry became convinced that a radical change both in form and content was called for if Urdu language and literature were to progress and be purposeful.

### **Anjuman-i Punjab**

At the time, Dr G W. Leitner was the Principal of Government College, Lahore. His is a great name in the history of education and particularly the advancement of Urdu in the Punjab. He was very keen to establish an 'Oriental University' in the province. Though he was thwarted in his design at every step, he never gave up. With patience and perseverance, he partially succeeded in his project, when the Lahore Government College was established in 1864. This did not satisfy him, though. The College was affiliated to the Calcutta University which had English as the medium of instruction. Leitner on the other hand was a great protagonist of all education being imparted in the mother-tongue of the student. In his opinion this could be achieved through an Oriental University only. However for this great step neither the government was willing, nor the public ready. With a view to mobilising support for his proposal, he established, to begin with, a society called *Anjuman-i Isha'at-i Matalab-i Mufida-i Punjab* in 1864. At the same time, he started a monthly

organ of the society. Very soon he realized that the name of the society was too long and cumbersome. Consequently on 1 January 1865, he changed it to *Anjuman-i Punjab*. It had as decoration wide-ranging aims in all walks of life but its real object was epitomised in the phrase 'renaissance of ancient Oriental knowledge and the spread of modern popular education through vernaculars.'

### **Muhammad Husain Azad**

Muhammad Husain Azad was in Lahore at the time. He immediately decided to use the Anjuman as a stepping stone for self-aggrandizement. Ever since he had fled Delhi after the unfortunate events of 1857 he had been in the wilderness—moral, financial and professional. All his efforts to rehabilitate himself had come to nought and he had failed to win recognition, public or official.

The Anjuman-i Punjab offered him a ray of hope. He intuitively guessed that the Anjuman platform was going to help him achieve his ambition. He joined the Anjuman and became one of its most active members. Leitner had for a long time been looking for such a lieutenant. Very soon close camaraderie developed between the two and Leitner appointed him the Editor of the *Sarkari Akhbar*, Anjuman's monthly magazine. In 1867, he was also made the Secretary of the Anjuman and soon after its Lecturer on a salary of Rs. 70 per mensem. Thus Azad came out of the woods completely. In 1869 Leitner recommended him to Captain (later Col) W.R.M. Holroyd, the Director of Public Instruction who, appointed him Assistant Professor of Arabic at the Government College, Lahore, on 2 August 1869 in a leave vacancy on a salary of Rs. 75 p.m. Maulvi Alamdar Husain who was the Professor of Arabic at the College had fallen ill and proceeded on sick leave for three months. Azad was engaged to officiate in his absence.

As ill luck would have it, Alamdar Husain passed away on 14 May 1870. Thereupon Azad was confirmed as Professor and his salary was raised to Rs. 150 p.m.

### Editor, 'Huma-i Punjab' (Weekly)

From the beginning of 1870, the Education Department of the Punjab Government began publishing a monthly magazine named *Ataliq-i Punjab*. Master Pearay Lal, who at the time was working as Curator, was made its Editor and Muhammad Husain Azad the Assistant Editor. Soon after, for some reason, the government stopped publication of the monthly and instead started a weekly, the *Huma-i Punjab* with Azad as its Editor. His services were engaged under a special authority of the Lieutenant Governor; he was permitted to undertake the editorship of the weekly in addition to his Assistant Professorship at the Government College. Azad remained the Editor of the *Huma-i Punjab* till February 1871, when under instructions from Leitner he handed over the charge to M. Muhammad Latif. This was only a temporary arrangement, however. Soon after Hali was entrusted with the editing of the weekly.

### Musha'ara 1874—New School of Urdu Poetry

It is a strange but nonetheless very heartening phenomenon that at this period the English ruling classes began taking keen interest in Urdu and its problems. In 1874 Sir Donald McLeod, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, addressed a letter to Col Holroyd, the Director of Public Instruction, suggesting that the Text Book Committee of the Education Department, which prescribed syllabi for study in both higher and secondary schools of the province, should include in its recommendations selections from Urdu poetry as well. In His Honour's opinion, poetry which always had a great educative value should not only

be studied but full advantage should be taken of it. He further advised that as "an important step forward" efforts should be made to produce "indigenous poetry of a non-sectarian character . . . to gradually replace the poetry in vogue today "

Col. Holroyd lost no time. Taking a cue from the head of the State, he set about earnestly to do the needful. He immediately drafted Muhammad Husain Azad to assist him in this cause. And one must admit that there could have been no happier choice.

Azad's pre-eminence amongst contemporary Urdu scholars and writers was undisputed. No doubt, he is not one of our major poets, but his knowledge of the language, his Urdu prose style and critical acumen were unrivalled. And what is more, he had been advocating making Urdu poetry cleaner and purposeful ever since 1867. So when Col. Holroyd entrusted him with this task, he devoted himself heart and soul to the job.

As a first step, a meeting of the Anjuman-i Punjab was called on 9 May 1874. In the beginning, Azad as the mouthpiece of the official mind read his written 'lecture' in which he detailed the ills of Urdu poetry. He was followed by Col. Holroyd who spoke at length highlighting the decadence prevailing in Urdu poetry. He exhorted the audience and all lovers of literature to devote their energies to its improvement. For this he suggested the foundation of a new kind of Musha'ara where poets, instead of writing *ghazals* in the rhyme of a given hemistich, will recite poems on a specific theme. And in conclusion, he proposed that for the first *Musha'ara* to be held the following month poets should compose poems about the 'Rainy Season.' There was no restriction placed on the form of the poem either. They could write a *mathnavi*, a *musaddas* or use any other form.

Hali gave whole-hearted support to Muhammad Husain Azad in this laudable venture of his. He participated in four such poetical congregations and recited his poems which were in *mathnavi* form *Barkha Rut* (The Rainy Season), *Nashat-i Ummid* (Pleasures of Hope), *Hubb-i Watan* (Patriotism) and *Munazara-i Rahm-o-Insaf* (Dialogue between Clemency and Justice). It is over a century ago these poems were first written, but they are avidly read to this day, highly praised and cherished by connoisseurs and lovers of poetry.

Records show that the *Musha'ara* where he recited the fourth *mathnavi* mentioned above was held on 14 November 1874. Thereafter he did not participate in any such gathering. It is, therefore, safe to surmise that he returned to Delhi either at the end of 1874 or the beginning of 1875.

### As a Prose Writer

During his stay at Lahore he seriously began writing Urdu prose as well. This was not his first attempt in this field, though. He had tried his hand at writing much earlier. Even during his student days at Delhi (1854-55), he had written a pamphlet in Arabic on some controversial theological topic, wherein he had endorsed the view-point earlier expressed by Nawab Siddiq Hasan Khan (Bhopal), who was deprecatingly dubbed a *wahabi* by his opponents. Hali showed the pamphlet to his teacher Maulvi Nawazish Ali most probably elatedly, this being his first sojourn into the realm of authorship. Nawazish Ali, a *Hanafi* by faith was mighty angry with his young pupil for his audacity in supporting a *wahabi*, scolded him for it and tore up the pamphlet. It can well be imagined what dampening effect this event must have had on the budding author. No wonder we find him silent for the next 10 years or so.

Most probably it was in 1864 that he wrote his first piece in Urdu. This was a *Maulood Sharif*, a sort of laudatory biographical account of the achievements of the Prophet of Islam meant for reading and recitation at religious gatherings. It remained in manuscript form for a very long time and was published for the first time in 1923 by Hali's younger son, Khwaja Sajjad Husam

Three years later in 1867 he wrote a rejoinder to an objectionable book of a native Christian, 'Imad-ud-Din by name. This man also belonged to Panipat

It is relevant to mention that Christian missionaries under the patronage of the government had by this time become very aggressive. Their proselytising activities began bearing fruits. In northern India their principal centres were Delhi, Agra and Bareilly, wherefrom they spread out their activities in neighbouring towns. In due course they succeeded in enticing away a Muslim family of Panipat too. One Mulla Siraj-ud-Din and his two sons, Khair-ud-Din and 'Imad-ud-Din went to Agra and got themselves baptized as Christians. Subsequently Siraj-ud-Din and his elder son Khair-ud-Din repented and reverted to their ancestral religion. The younger brother 'Imad-ud-Din, however, stuck to his new faith. He was given employment in the Mission and otherwise too well looked after by his new masters. He knew Arabic as well. In his zeal, he wrote a book entitled *Hidayatul-Muslimeen*, in which he made a comparison between Christianity and Islam running down the latter. This was understandable because he had to justify his giving up Islam and going over to his new faith. But *inter alia* he brought in the founders of the two faiths, Jesus Christ and Muhammad and made some very disparaging remarks about the Prophet of Islam. Hali replied under the title of *Taryaq-i Masmoom*. This was serialised in a Muslim monthly of



Delhi, *Khair-al Mawa'iz*, in 1868. In his rejoinder, Hali not only vehemently refuted the arguments of the new convert but also adduced strong arguments to defend and prove superiority of the Islamic faith and teachings.

Later on 'Imad-ud-Din wrote another book *Tarikh-i Muhammadi*, in which again scurrilous attacks were made on Islam and the Prophet. Hali wrote a detailed review of this book too under the caption: *Tarikh-i Muhammadi par Munsifana Rai*. This was published in 1870 or 1871. It is no more traceable, unfortunately.

### 'Mabadi-i 'Ilm-i Geology'

Most probably at the instance of Dr. Leitner he translated from Arabic a book on geology. The Egyptian author had in his turn translated it from French. This was meant to be taught in schools and he gave its right of publication to the Punjab University without asking for any royalty. The Punjab University first published it in 1883.

### 'Majalis-un-Nisa'

Nazir Ahmed had already written novels for the fair sex. He had done this for the study of his own daughter and later on these manuscripts got into print. Hali saw these books and was so impressed with them that he himself wrote a book entitled *Majalis-un-Nisa*. This is divided into two parts, and was published in 1874, a few months before he returned to Delhi. Col. Holroyd was so pleased with the book that he recommended an award of Rs. 400 to the author. This was bestowed upon Hali by the Viceroy Lord Northbrook, at an Educational Durbar held in Delhi in 1875 to coincide with the visit of the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII).

### Return to Delhi

Lahore of this period was a great centre of learning as well as a busy hub of Urdu literature. The atmosphere was entirely to Hali's liking and bent of mind. Despite this he missed Delhi where he had spent his youth and formative years. Also the Lahore climate did not suit him; he was often ill and his health gradually deteriorated. Being away from kith and kin began to tell upon his general outlook on life. The poems he wrote during his stay at Lahore are replete with thoughts of sadness and pangs of separation from Delhi and its society. In one of the *ghazals* composed in his early Lahore days, for example, he thus laments his plight :

Whom does the breeze remind of the Garden ?  
I'm not a nightingale, nor the Garden anymore my  
abode.

I wish I could relate to you the tale of an exile's agony !  
But tearful sentiments have sealed my lips.

Only when one lives in Lahore does he realise,  
why this world is called 'Home of Sorrows'.

From nowhere comes even a breath of the lost Joseph  
Maybe everyone is stricken with grief.

Here everyone is so hostile  
that even a nightingale is alien to the garden.

But Lahorites needn't pity me for loneliness,  
I still retain a big jovial crowd in my memories.

## HALI

In my solitude there lives a boisterous congregation  
Even my silence is pregnant with desire to speak.

I would have long ago passed out in the realm of eternity  
It is the memory of dear friends that prevents my doing  
so.

It wouldn't let me rest even in paradise,  
if my love for my birthplace continued to be that  
intense.

Unfortunately, he did never feel at home all through his stay at Lahore. *Barkha Rut* (The Rainy Season) is a poem of 1874, when his sojourn was coming to an end; and he had been living there for nearly four years. We find the following lines in this poem

Someone tired of his life  
separated from his kith and kin  
A victim of the privations of a foreign land  
incapable of movement.  
Without a friend or a sympathiser,  
he is sitting on the river bank.  
He ponders over the difficulties of travel  
without care for self or home  
When the rain breeze started blowing  
And the lightning began constantly flashing  
In the soothing touch of the breeze  
he forgot all the hardships of his journey.  
No sooner he got something to interest him,  
he recalled happy moments of yore.  
Worth seeing was the scene,  
when he began crying non-stop

He addressed life-giving waters  
of the cloud thus .

“O fountain head of all life !  
may your flow never abate !

Where you are headed for,  
you will find my hamlet on the wayside.

If you come across my cronies.

I make an earnest request to you,  
first to greet them on my behalf  
and then convey this message

It was ordained thus that  
this rainy season should come  
when I'm separated from you ;

Whenever I think of you,  
I see two ducks swimming on water  
Like that, we used to swim together  
*in the tank, morn and evening.*

When grass is green and flowers are in bloom,  
enjoyment of companionship comes to mind

Hand in hand we roamed  
carefree, day and night.

When a mango fruit falls from a tree,  
I look around if you are somewhere nearby.  
And when I see no one there,  
I pity my loneliness.

Mango season is at hand and  
friends nowhere to see.  
I hate such a life.

Every drop of rain that falls  
burns me like ambers  
without you.

The cold breeze caresses my body  
but inside me something is on fire

‘How can one be happy in a  
 strange land when his mind  
 is full of the memories of his home !’  
 I heard this anguished cry and was  
 grief-stricken . who could it be ?  
 for a long time I was dumb  
 and couldn’t make out,  
 who it was !  
 But then I looked at him  
 more attentively  
 and lo, who should I find  
 but our old friend : Hali.

A very feeling and poignant piece, that. No wonder, therefore, that he decided to return to Delhi which he did at the end of 1874 or early in 1875. Luckily, he did not have to remain idle for a long time and soon got a teaching job in the Anglo-Arabic School, Delhi. He was to teach Arabic here. The job was low-paid, carrying a meagre salary of Rs. 60 per mensem. But it was after his heart and the atmosphere congenial. He was, therefore, fully satisfied with it.

### ‘Musaddas-i Hali’

It is well known that Urdu poetry since its inception had been moving in a closed circle without making any tangible progress. Hali had been dissatisfied with the situation for a long time and had occasionally thought of introducing certain reforms to make it more useful. His stay at Lahore and participation in the *Musha‘ara* started by Muhammad Husain Azad gave an impetus to his reformatory zeal. Luckily, on his return to Delhi he met Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. Sir Syed, as is well known, was far ahead of his times. He had a burning desire to put his countrymen on

the road to progress in all fields of life particularly in education. With that end in view he had at different times founded societies and started journals and magazines to educate the people. And ultimately in 1875 he founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which in due course developed into a full-fledged University.

Contact with such a dynamic personality could not fail to have far-reaching results. Hali had already been conscious of the failings of the literary community and the wrong direction in which it was moving. He had, however, not been able to pinpoint either the most sensitive area of the malaise or the remedy for it. Sir Syed gave him this direction and crystallized his fluid thoughts. Sir Syed asked him to write a poem which would diagnose the malady from which the nation was suffering and prescribe some remedy to get rid of it. The result was the writing of his famous poem *Madd-o Jazr-i Islam* (Rise and Fall of Islam) commonly known as *Musaddas-i Hali*, which first appeared at the beginning of June, 1879. In its third edition which was published in 1886, besides some verbal changes here and there, Hali also added 162 fresh stanzas at the end.

### ‘Hayat-i Sa‘di’

In 1886, Hali published the first of his biographical trio, *Hayat-i Sa‘di*, a critical biography of the well-known poet-philosopher Muslih-ud-Din of Shiraz. This was not his first attempt at this kind of writing, though. In 1882 he had edited and published the travelogue of the famous eleventh century Persian author Nasir Khusrau ‘Alavi. Nasir Khusrau had travelled over a wide part of western Asia and spent about seven years in his wanderings. Subsequently he wrote an account of his experiences; this

is probably the first travel book in Persian. Luckily a manuscript of the book was preserved in the private collection of Nawab Zia-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, 'Nayyar' 'Rakshhan' of Delhi. The well-known French scholar Charles Scheffer somehow came to know of it. He got hold of this manuscript through the good offices of the Government of India and eventually published it with his French translation. When in due course the manuscript was returned to Nawab Zia-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, Hali, who at the time was working in the Anglo-Arabic School, thought of publishing it in India. Consequently he edited the book and published it in 1882. He added to it an exhaustive and thoroughly researched biographical introduction. Till this day, we have not been able to add any material fact to what he had written.

Work about Sa'di was no less commendable. Sa'di's, *Gulistan* and *Bostan* are great-names in Persian literature and have for centuries been a part of the syllabus in our junior schools. Very little was, however, known about the author. So far *Hayat-i Sa'di* is the best and most complete biography of Sa'di in our language. Its excellence has been recognised in the land of his birth as well. Long ago, a good translation of the book was published from Teheran.

### **Aitchison College, Lahore**

In January 1887 Hali received an offer from the Aitchison Chief's College, Lahore. This college (named after Sir Charles Aitchison, the Lt. Governor) was established by the Indian Government for the education of children of the Rulers of Indian States and the titled gentry and other influential sections of the population. They required a Superintendent for the College Hostel. The authorities of the college probably knew Hali since his earlier Lahore

days. If so, it bespeaks very highly of his character and integrity. It was a proof of the respect he enjoyed that he was considered a fit person to look after the students, and no ordinary students at that. He accepted the offer and went to Lahore to join duty.

The same old trouble recurred. The Lahore climate did not suit him and he began keeping indifferent health, which in any case had never been very robust.

Association with the students at the Aitchison College, some of whom were destined to become Rulers of their States in due course could easily have been used by Hali as a means to improve his worldly position. But neither living at Lahore was good for his health nor did he find it convenient to stay away from home all by himself, indefinitely. Rosy prospects for the future could hardly be attraction enough for his contented mind. He therefore resigned within six months and returned to his old post in the Anglo-Arabic School, Delhi in June 1887.

### **Stipend from Hyderabad**

In 1887, Nawab Sir Asman Jah, the Prime Minister of Hyderabad (Deccan) paid a visit to Simla. At the request of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan he found time to come to Aligarh as well. Sir Syed received him at the M.A.O. College and introduced his close associates to him. Sir Asman Jah who had already heard about Hali and read his poetry was greatly impressed by the unassuming personality of the poet. He expressed a desire that a person like Hali should be free from mundane worries to enable to devote all his time and energy in the service of literature and creative arts. He offered to grant a stipend for Hali from the Department of Literature and Arts of the Nizam's Government. At the time Hali was drawing the paltry monthly salary of Rs 60 from the Anglo-Arabic



School where he was teaching Arabic. In his modesty he mentioned that this sum would suffice to meet his worldly needs and he did not desire any higher grant. Accordingly, a stipend of Rs. 75 (Hali)\* p m was granted with effect from the beginning of 1888. The following year Hali resigned from the Anglo-Arabic School on the plea that the Hyderabad stipend was sufficient for his subsistence and he no longer needed to continue the service of the School.

Three years later when Hali went to Hyderabad with Sir Syed as a member of the M.A.O. College deputation in 1891 the stipend was raised by Rs. 25 (Hali) to Rs. 100 p.m., which he continued to receive till his death.

Not only that, he thought it was no more necessary even to stay in Delhi. For quite some time he had been deeply feeling the emptiness caused by the passing away of most of his friends who had left this world one after the other since the holocaust of 1857. He, therefore, bade good-bye to Delhi and shifted his residence to Panipat in August, 1889.

### **‘Munajat-i Bewa’**

In 1884, he wrote his famous poem *Munajat-i Bewa* (A Widow's Prayer). The condition of our widows in olden times was hopelessly miserable and degrading to the extreme. This was even more reprehensible because of early marriages and a kind of social taboo on widow re-marriage. Child widow was no stray phenomenon particularly amongst the Hindus. Muslims imitated their neighbours and amongst others took over this unfortunate custom as

\*Hyderabad currency was officially called ‘Hali’. In value it was 25 per cent less than the British Indian Rupee, e.g., British Indian Rs. 60 were equivalent to Rs. 75 Hali.

well. Poor child-widow remained all her life a dependent upon the charity of others without being able to express her feelings. Hali, who had a tender heart for every down-trodden and oppressed person, could not fail to notice the pitiable plight of this section of our people. The outcome was his poem entitled *Munajat-i Bewa* in which he has depicted the feelings of a widow who had lost her husband even before she knew what marital life was.

### ‘Muqaddama’ and ‘Diwan’

In 1893, he put together his stray poems most of which had previously appeared in periodicals and magazines and published his *Diwan*. There was nothing novel in this exercise. Hundreds of poets before him had collected their poetical pieces and published them. He, however, introduced the innovation of adding a comprehensive Introduction\* in which he spelt out his theory of poetry and what it should be.

During his service with the Government of the Punjab Book Depot, Lahore (1870-74), he had occasion to study western thought through translations. All books translated from English into Urdu had necessarily to pass through his hands because he was required to bring them in conformity with Urdu idiom. This not only acquainted him with the views of western writers but also helped him crystallize his own thoughts which had so far been in a fluid condition. This made him realise the frivolity of a large mass of Urdu poetry. He became confirmed in the opinion that literature

\*It would appear that he attached more importance to this Introduction than to the *Diwan*. On the title page of the volume, against the accepted practice, he mentioned the book as ‘Introduction, with *Diwan-i Hali*’ and not the other way round. It is also relevant to add that in the 1893-edition, the ‘Introduction’ covered 228 pages while the *Diwan* comprised 202 pages only

in general and poetry in particular should definitely be used in the service of the society. Gradually he changed his own style of writing and made it more purposeful. Now that he was compiling his *Diwan*, he gave free vent to his reformist ideas and dealt at length as to how our writers and poets could make up this literary deficiency. He surveyed in detail the existing volume of Urdu poetry and condemned its thought-content particularly and suggested ways and means to improve it. This Introduction remained with the *Diwan* in its later editions also and was for the first time published separately in 1920. Ever since it has been taken as an independent book and has ceased to be a part of the *Diwan*.

### ‘Yadgar-i Ghalib’

Ghalib died in 1869. His pre-eminence in the field of Urdu poetry, especially in *ghazal* has been universally acknowledged. Hali had been close to him during his later years. He has said that he derived more benefit from the society of Shaifita than from Ghalib whose pupil he was. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that he was greatly influenced by Ghalib’s innovations and non-conformist attitude of mind. Ghalib had discarded old style lyricism and introduced more depth and philosophical thought in his poetry. Hali could hardly ignore this proclivity of his mentor and coupled with his own inclination to Western ideas he clinched the argument to its natural conclusion by writing his Introduction to the *Diwan*. Naturally the death of Ghalib in February, 1869 was greatly felt by him. He wrote a very moving elegy on his master’s death which till today stands out prominently in this genre of poetry. When emotions subsided and conditions became normal, a number of pupils of the departed master approached Hali to write a critical biography of Ghalib. He began collec-

ting material for this and ultimately published *Yadgar-i Ghalib* in 1897, the first birth-centenary year of the poet.

### ‘Hayat-i Javeed’

Sir Syed’s services to his community and the country were so vast and outstanding that it was but natural that sooner or later some one would attempt writing his life story. We find that the first one to think of it was an Englishman Lt. Col. G F.I. Graham. He published his book entitled, *The Life and Works of Syed Ahmad Khan C S I* when Sir Syed was still alive (Edinburgh and London 1885)\* It was after this that Q. Siraj-ud-Din of the Weekly *Chaudhavin Sadi* of Rawalpindi wrote a biography of Sir Syed in Urdu. He collected the material for it and forwarded his complete manuscript to Hon’ble Haji Isma’il Khan of Dattawali, a friend of Sir Syed, requesting him to make arrangements for its publication. This book unfortunately never saw the light of day, and even the manuscript is not traceable.

Hali too had conceived the idea of compiling a biography during Sir Syed’s lifetime. He tried to enlist the cooperation of Sir Syed himself for the collection of requisite data for it. Sir Syed did not prove helpful, though, and the project remained at a standstill for a long time. In 1894 Hali made another attempt. He personally went to Aligarh and stayed with Sir Syed for a few months and collected whatever information he could extract from him. Subsequently also, he occasionally went to Aligarh for the same purpose. When Haji Isma’il Khan got news of Hali’s project, he forwarded the manuscript of Q Siraj-

\*The second revised edition of this book was published 24 years later, after the death of Sir Syed when the author had become a Major General, under the title *The Life and Work of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan K.C.S.I.* (London : 1909).

ud-Din to him. Hali later acknowledged his debt to Q. Siraj-ud-Din. Unfortunately, Hali could not complete the book in the life-time of Sir Syed, who died on 27 March 1898. Hali's book, entitled *Hayat-i Javeed* was first published three years later in March, 1901.

### **Islam-un-Nisa dies**

Before the publication of *Hayat-i Javeed* in 1901, Hali suffered a very sad bereavement. His wife Islam-un-Nisa died of cholera on 22 August 1900.

They had lived together for nearly half a century. Islam-un-Nisa was illiterate and from all accounts appears to have been a short-tempered lady. In spite of that, in this half a century of companionship they never had any serious differences between them, although Hali himself belonged to the Sunni sect of Islam and his wife was of Shi'a faith. In that society marriages between the two sects were quite common. Tolerance was the accepted norm of life, in the same family lived people side by side professing different allegiances. The situation has changed considerably since then and people have rigidly compartmentalized their denominational affiliations. This has naturally led to a good deal of alienation and consequently ugly scenes of discord are not very rare.

Hali had six children from this marriage of whom three survived. The eldest son Akhlaq Husain (1856-1924) was later on adopted by Hali's elder brother Khwaja Imdad Husain (d. 1886) who had no issue of his own. Next was a daughter Inayat Fatima. Youngest was Khwaja Sajjad Husain (b. 1861) who later on joined the Educational Service of the Punjab Government and retired as Inspector of Schools. He died on 12 July 1946.

Besides these three who outlived their parents, there were three others who died young. First was a boy I'tiqad

Husain by name; he lived for seven or eight years only. Next was a girl, Ruqayya, who died at the age of ten or so. The third was also a boy who died in infancy when he was only a few months old

### **Title of Shams-ul 'Ulama**

In 1904 the Government conferred upon Hali the highest literary title of Shams-ul 'Ulama. This recognition of his literary merit and sustained services to the society thrilled the public and they were greatly pleased at the Government honouring Hali. He himself did not evince any great enthusiasm on the occasion because he was afraid that henceforth whenever a dignitary visited Panipat and held a levee, along with other title-holders he would also have to attend the *darbar*. By nature of retiring habits, he neither had the time nor the desire to wait upon and cultivate the influential and official circles. Nevertheless, he accepted the honour and expressed his gratitude to the Government.

### **Visit to Hyderabad**

In December, 1905, he visited Hyderabad to participate in the fortieth anniversary of the accession to the throne of Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, Nizam VI. Hali was now old and keeping very indifferent health. But he could not turn down the invitation, especially when he had been a stipendiary of the Nizam's government for the past 20 years. Willy-nilly he had to undertake this long and arduous journey. He stayed in Hyderabad for about six months, till the beginning of June, 1906. During his stay he became the focus of literary activities on a large scale. The State subjects presented him with an address of felicitations in which were recounted his services to the cause of education, literature and the nation at large.

The cordial and affectionate treatment meted out to him

at Hyderabad could hardly be forgotten. Consequently, he always had the welfare of his friends in Hyderabad at heart. In September, 1908, Hyderabad was the victim of a devastating flood in the rivulet Moosi. He was greatly perturbed about the welfare of his friends there. The city of Hyderabad is built on both banks of this rivulet, and most of his friends lived in that vicinity. Naturally they could not have escaped the destructive fury of the flood. The letters he wrote in those days to his friends in Hyderabad are an index of the anguish and concern he felt for their well-being.

### **President, All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference**

He was now a permanent resident of Panipat. His health which had never been very sound was at a very low ebb. He could hardly undertake any long journey even though he was from time to time invited to participate in various literary and social functions held in different parts of the country. But his countrymen would not let him rest. In December 1907, the twentyfirst annual session of the All-India Muhammadan Educational Conference was held at Karachi. Much against his wishes he was elected to preside over this session. No excuse on his part could persuade the Central Standing Committee to change their decision. Perforce he had to undertake the long tiresome railway journey to meet the wishes of his friends. The Presidential Address delivered by him on the occasion like most of his other writings is full of sincere thoughts and deep feelings for the future of his community in particular and the country in general. He clearly said in his address that the University education being imparted to our young generation was not enough and it was essential that the students were given vocational training in industrial arts as well. He also advocated the cause of *Swadeshi*

and exhorted his countrymen to adopt it with a view to ameliorating the miserable condition of our poorer classes. Besides this in his address he indirectly urged upon the people to take more interest in the political affairs of the country.

### **Victoria Memorial Public Library**

Panipat was (and still is) a very small town. It did not have even a modern school worth the name. Nor was there any library where people could go and spend their leisure hours usefully. Queen Victoria died in January 1901. The local gentry met in a condolence meeting and decided to set up an institution to perpetuate the memory of the great Queen. Hali availed of the enthusiasm prevailing at the time and proposed that a High School be established. The contributions received from the public during the next three years were hardly about three thousand, an amount grossly inadequate for the establishment of a school. It was, therefore, decided that instead a memorial public library be set up. He donated his own collection of books for this library. Some of his friends also came forward and gave away most of their books and others from outside also helped. Thus a fairly representative library came into existence which served the needs of the people for a long time. Unfortunately, it was destroyed in the communal frenzy of 1947.

Though at the time his wish to set up a school could not be fulfilled, his younger son, Khwaja Sajjad Husain, later on established a school in his memory which in due course developed into the Hali Muslim High School and served the cause of education for a considerable time. Unfortunately, this institution too perished in 1947.



## Last Days

With age Hali's eyesight had been gradually deteriorating but pressure of work would not permit him to attend to it. Soon after his return from Hyderabad he realized that cataract had affected his right eye. He appreciated the seriousness of the situation because he could no longer read or write which was dearer to him than anything else. Khwaja Ghulam-us-Saqalain, the husband of his granddaughter (Mushtaq Fatima), was at Lucknow at the time. They insisted that he should go to Lucknow and have a surgical operation performed on the eye. He was reluctant to be a burden on any one, and therefore refused to accept their invitation. In the meantime he discovered that his second eye too was failing to function. He could no longer postpone the surgical operation if he did not wish to go completely blind. Consequently the operation on the right eye was performed at the Rajendra Hospital, Patiala, which gave him partial relief. In due course when the cataract in the left eye matured he had to go in May 1911 to Lucknow, where operation on this eye was performed. In spite of these operations his eye-sight never regained the perfection which he previously had. All the same it was restored to an extent that after being fitted with glasses he could somehow carry on his daily routine of study and writing.

At the end of 1912, he began collecting his stray writings in Persian and Arabic. He was quite proficient and had a facile pen in both the languages. But he never devoted much time to writing in them. With some effort he was able to put together his writings and the slim volume which we now have was published in 1913.

## The End

He was in the twilight of his life now. In fact, his health

had been damaged during his first visit to Delhi (1854-55) when he had to lead a life of sheer poverty and privation during his student days at *madrassa* Husain Bakhsh. He had hardly recouped from the ill effects of this sad experience when the second and severer blow fell in 1857, when he had to escape from Hissar to Panipat in fear of his life. All his life he complained of one thing or the other. He was a permanent patient of asthma and had attacks of influenza quite frequently. In addition he was afflicted with the debilitating disease of piles. Towards the end his eyes were a constant source of trouble to him. What is worse he never took his ailments seriously and always neglected to get himself properly treated. It was quite obvious that the natural end was not far off. A few months prior to his death due to a partial paralytic stroke he lost the faculty of speech. He could hear all right and comprehend when someone spoke to him but if he wanted to say something in reply, his tongue failed to cooperate with his desire and he ended up with a helpless smile.

He peacefully passed away in the early hours of 1 January, 1915\* at Panipat at the age of 77 and was buried in the precincts of the local mausoleum of the famous saint Shah Sharaf-ud-Din Bu Ali Qalandar.

Hali was a great man. Not only his successors, even his contemporaries were convinced of his high qualities. Justice Syed Mahmood once told his father Sir Syed Ahmad Khan : "Father, if God ever asked me the question 'of all my people whom you had opportunities to meet, was there one whom your heart prompted you to worship', I will have a ready answer and say 'Yes, Altaf

\*It has been generally mentioned by Hali's biographers that he died on 31 December 1914. In fact, he passed away after midnight at about 2 a.m., i.e., early hours of 1 January 1915. (Vide *Kulliyat-i Nasr-i Hali*, Introduction)

Husain Hali'." And we cannot attribute this remark to blind faith or the impulsive outburst of a weak mind. After all to judge the character of a man one has to take into account as to what he says and what he does Hali's life is before us like an open book. His consideration for his family, his love for his friends and fellowmen, his being ever ready to serve and help his countrymen are evident from whatever we know of him. He could not tolerate cruelty to let alone a human being, even an animal His thoughts are scattered on every page of his works There could be no nobler ideas or precepts for the guidance of the young and the old alike than what Hali has left behind If it is true that what comes out of a utensil is an index of what is inside it, we can well judge the mind of the man who said all these things.

And what a contented mind and selfless soul he was ! His association with Aitchison College, Lahore, could have been immensely useful But he gave it up. Sir Asman Jah asked him as to what stipend would suffice for his needs ! His answer was Rs. 60 p m , the salary he was getting from the Anglo-Arabic School. To what can we attribute this modesty except to his inherent contentment. Sir Syed had great influence in the erstwhile Hyderabad (Deccan) State. Many of his friends benefited from this connection and got themselves fixed in the service there on fat salaries. If Hali had desired, he could have exploited Sir Syed's patronage. But it never even occurred to him.

Take another instance, that of his books. He never thought of using the Law of Copy Right to retain the right of publishing his books exclusively by himself and his progeny. Publishers all over the country brought out his books with impunity as and when they liked. *Musaddas-i Hali* alone has gone through innumerable editions. And when we consider that he was not a rich man and lived all

his life on a very modest income, for him to have foregone voluntarily this legitimate source of revenue seems to be an extra-ordinary example of his innate quality of selflessness and contentment. A rare soul, indeed.

A critic has regretfully expressed the opinion that he wished Hali had some time come down from his high pedestal and somewhere made a human slip. There could be no higher tribute to Hali than this ! But the intensely didactic background of which he was the product and the Victorian society in which he lived his life could not have permitted Hali to satisfy the wish of our critic.



## Part Two

### W O R K

Wherever in our political history or educational history or social history or literary history during the past half a century, you come across a healthy trend or movement, on investigation you will discover that its source lies in the pure fountain-head of the efforts put in by that litterateur, poet, reformer, patriot and above all that pious, angelic person called Hali.

**Zakir Husain**

Hali was essentially a reformer and an educationist. His burning love for knowledge and learning is evident from the fact that at the early age of seventeen, he preferred education to the comforts of his home and ran away to Delhi, which was at the time not only the capital of India but also the Mecca of all seekers of knowledge. Like the last bright flicker of a dying flame political power and influence of the house of Babur was almost on the verge of extinction and in a couple of years was to collapse completely. The metropolis had become the centre of learning, art and culture as the political power was on decline. In the field of poetry alone we find such outstanding names as Ghalib, Momin, Zauq, Azurda, Shaifta, Mamnoon, 'Aish and a host of others—a galaxy the like of which no city has witnessed since. Hali was fortunate

that he was thrown amongst such giants who are today the by-words of Urdu literature. It was at this time that he came in touch with Ghalib and their relationship gradually developed into that combination of a master and a pupil which ultimately made Hali the pioneer and best interpreter of Ghalib.

## Delhi Milieu

Very little is known of his contacts at this period of his life. He himself has stated that he occasionally visited Ghalib from whom he learnt some Persian and also showed him some of his compositions in Urdu and probably Persian as well. But we know that Ghalib had a very large circle of friends amongst the literary and intellectual class of the city. It was inevitable therefore for Hali to meet some of them in varying degrees of intimacy. It can be safely said that it was his contacts established at this time that eventually helped him find the place of close companionship with Shafiq. Moving amongst such savants could not but have a deep and lasting impact upon his young mind. In fact, he must have been bewildered with so much of knowledge and erudition around him. It encouraged the latent poet in him to come to surface and manifest itself. That is how he began writing poetry which elicited the encouraging approval from Ghalib, mentioned earlier.

## '1857'

The great upheaval of 1857 was not far off. This was not only a political catastrophe in which many a crowned head rolled but it also destroyed centuries-old traditions and values. The country came under the political domination of a foreign power which gradually led the local population to adopt its language and way of life in the

bargain. In such circumstances the usual reaction of weaker minds is either to have feelings of hatred or revolt against the alien ruler or go to the other extreme and develop a sense of inferiority about his own compatriots who had so easily fallen a prey to the foreigner. Luckily, Hali kept his balance and struck a *via media* between the two extremes. Paradoxically, this apparently hopeless situation brought to the fore the dormant reformer in him. He had already, since his Delhi days, been pondering over the futility of our poetry which had been moving in a vicious circle from the very beginning. He now began thinking seriously to put this powerful vehicle of expression in the service of reform and uplift of his country. But as yet he had not found his direction or the guiding spirit. This he found soon first in the person of Shaifita and later on in the guidance of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

### **Influence of 'Shaifita'**

Shaifita is not a great poet nor his contribution to Urdu literature is of any outstanding order. But the fact that Hali remained with him for seven years or more during which period Shaifita was able to mould Hali's mind and crystallize his nebulous thoughts is in itself no small achievement. Shaifita did not believe in ornamentation or decoration of language with far-fetched similes or couching his thoughts in difficult diction. He was a great protagonist of keeping as near to the original thought as possible and expressing oneself in an attractive style without departing from the truth or the text. Shaifita did not favour the use of slang or non-standard idiom in poetry. In this respect Ghalib was even more strict and forthright. This was the first positive characteristic which Hali imbibed when he began writing poetry.



### Lahore Musha'ara, 1874

The second impetus came during his stay at Lahore from 1870 to 1874, when Muhammad Husain Azad founded the famous *musha'ara* (poetical symposium) under the auspices of the Anjuman-i Panjab. For the first time the participating poets were asked to write poems on specific subjects instead of *ghazals* in a fixed rhyme. Hali contributed to these *musha'aras* four *mathnavis* which till this day are considered amongst his best poems.

### Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

But even though he had become a fairly well-known poet, it could not be said that he had found his bearings or knew his direction or reached his destination. This came to be revealed in the person of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan whom he met about 1875. Sir Syed has been rightly adjudged as the greatest thinker and reformer of his community during the nineteenth century. Scion of a well-known and influential family of Delhi, which had loyally served the later Mughals for long, he began his career in the service of the new British rulers. During the disturbances of 1857, even in the face of imminent danger to his own life he had staunchly stood by the British and was instrumental in saving many Englishmen and women from massacre. But the post-1857 happenings and the brutality with which the local population was treated and persecuted by the British conquerors transformed him into a new man. The brunt of British vendetta had fallen on the Muslim community in general. It was from the Muslim rulers that the British had snatched the reins of power and in their opinion it was the Muslim feudal lords who had engineered the revolt to dislodge them from the seat of government. The objective Sir Syed set before him was to dispel the suspicion which the British rulers harboured

against the Muslims and bring the two nearer each other. He realised that most of the ills from which his community was suffering were due to their apathy to Western knowledge in general and the learning of English language in particular. The Hindus had taken to learning English ever since the British set foot on the Indian soil. The British had founded schools and colleges in Calcutta and Madras to which Hindu students had flocked in large numbers where they learnt not only English language but also acquired other knowledge which obtained in the West. In due course this education had enabled the educated Hindus to secure employment with trading houses and administrative offices of the British. While all this was going on around them the Muslim community was asking for *fat-wahs* from their religious divines whether the learning of English was in consonance with the teachings of Islam or not ! Most of these divines had given their verdict in the negative. This attitude not only isolated the Muslim community from the rest of the population, but engendered in them a feeling of hatred and antagonism towards the foreign intruders also.

## Christian Missionary Activities

The British rulers too were equally to blame. Wherever they went Christian missionaries came in their wake. This was the time when zealous evangelists were very active in England and wanted to take the torch of Christianity to the four corners of the earth. To them the securing of a foothold by the British in a vast country like India was a divine sign that this sub-continent was ripe to receive the message of Christ. Consequently, the missionaries in their zeal adversely criticized both Hinduism and Islam. Their efforts at proselytizing were to some extent crowned with success. Many a newly educated youth from amongst

Hindus and Muslims left his ancestral faith and entered the fold of Christianity. Most of these new converts were Hindus. The Hindu community is traditionally very tolerant in the matter of religion and faith. There was some heart-burning amongst the Hindus though, but it did not lead to any violent reaction. On the other hand, the few Muslims who had embraced Christianity set the whole community aflame. The initial suspicion of the religious leaders of the Muslim community who had voted against their co-religionists joining the schools and colleges started by the British Government was confirmed. There were other minor contributory factors too which widened the original gulf between the Muslims and the British rulers.

When the revolt of 1857 failed and the British rulers came down with a heavy hand on the Muslim community, Sir Syed realized that things had drifted aimlessly too long. He diagnosed the disease to be the result of ignorance and non-adjustment with changing conditions. Consequently, he advocated the establishing of schools and colleges where the Muslims should learn not only the English language but also try to know the western way of life and how to make friends with them. He was opposed tooth and nail by a major section of his community. He was insulted, called names and declared a heretic (*kafir*). Sir Syed was, however, made of a different mettle. He ignored all the attacks and calumnies and unswervingly pursued the course he had chosen for himself. As always happens in such cases, in due course of time more people began seeing the light and in a few years there was gathered around Sir Syed a bunch of faithful and far-seeing friends and companions. Hali was amongst them.

This was the third important influence which helped Hali decide upon and work for the goal of his life. Not that he had not realised about the ills of his society, but so far

he had not found his guide and mentor Providence sent him this in the person of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

### 'Muqaddama-i Shi'r-o-Sha'iri'

Hali was basically a reformer and progressist. He spent his life trying to introduce genuine reforms in all those walks of life with which he was associated. He wrote his historic preface to the collection of his poems which was separately published under the title *Muqaddama-i Shi'r-o-Sha'iri*. In this he has surveyed the entire field of Urdu poetry in all its facets and highlighted its fatuity and emphasised the need for reform. As is well known he knew no English. Despite this serious handicap he has aptly and copiously quoted from Western writers and critics to reinforce his point of view. This was possible because of his association with the writings of English authors in translation which he had occasion to see during his Lahore days. This Introduction was first published with his *diwan* in 1893. Much water has flown under the bridges since then and the science of literary criticism has advanced a great deal. Nevertheless it is a fact that arguments advanced by Hali for the reform of Urdu poetry have not only stood the test of time but also proved by and large sound and of permanent value. That is not all. The *Muqaddama* was the first serious attempt wherein the principles of criticism were propounded in Urdu. Prior to this there was nothing to evaluate Urdu poetry. It is amazing that this very first attempt should have been so comprehensive and founded upon unassailable ground that till today we need its support and approval. Many a book has appeared in Urdu which has drawn heavily upon western scholarship and theory but no one has dared either seriously to contradict the *Muqaddama* or reject it.

*Ghazal*. The real object of Hali in writing this lengthy

Introduction to his *diwan* was, however, not to establish any new school of criticism. His sole aim was to tell the Urdu world that in writing this sort of poetry they had not contributed to the betterment of their own society or made any substantial addition to world literature

Like all literature the world over, Urdu poetry also has various genres of composition. For a long time Urdu poets tried to emulate their Persian predecessors whom they followed not only in form but in content and detail as well. Take, for example, the *ghazal*. Persian *ghazal* was naturally the product of Iranian milieu of which wine and woman, nightingale and its songs, tavern and *saqi* were common features. If therefore the Persian *ghazal* writer referred to these things in his compositions he had ample justification for doing so. That was the atmosphere obtaining around him in which he breathed. The Indian poet, on the other hand, could advance no such argument in his defence if he followed in the footsteps of his Persian masters. Life in the Indian society worked on an entirely different plane. Naturally, therefore, what Indian poet did was not only artificial and far-fetched but also degrading and demoralizing because it was imitation and contrived.

*Qasida* Take another example, that of the *qasida*. In the Persian language we have such famous names as Khaqani, Anvari, Zaheer, Urfi, and a large number of other poets who are held in high esteem as *qasida* writers. *Qasida* is a sort of rhapsody wherein the writer eulogises a person and his achievements hyperbolically. Most of the Persian *qasida* writers were Court poets of one royal house or the other. They were, therefore, not far from the real world when they compared their subject with mighty kings and conquerors of the past. The king or ruler of a small principality was still sitting on a throne and in a position to bestow favours upon the poet. On the other hand what

happened in India was not only unnatural but ridiculous as well. Zauq is one of the top-most *qasida* writers of Urdu. He was connected with the court of the last of the Mughals, Bahadur Shah II (Zafar). We all know what Bahadur Shah's position was. His fiat was not obeyed even within the four walls of the Red Fort. The East India Company paid him a regular monthly stipend which was his sole source of subsistence. For all intents and purposes he was at the mercy of the British Resident who wielded vast administrative and financial powers. But when Zauq writes a *qasida* in praise of this very Bahadur Shah, he compares him not only with his own ancestors like Shah Jahan and Akbar the Great, but also with the great ancient kings and emperors of Iran. Obviously, he looks so ridiculous and nauseatingly verbose and unreal. These examples could be easily multiplied.

Hali put his finger on the weak spots of our poetry. His argument was that the poet is a member, in fact a product, of the society. He has thus endless opportunities to detect the ills of his fellowmen and prescribe for their cure and betterment. Being a poet, he has the additional advantage of being able to communicate and propagate his views without let or hindrance. If he does not realise his responsibility and fails to apply his mind to the advancement of his people he is not only not doing his duty but is also ungrateful to his creator who had endowed him with certain useful faculties. Hali therefore suggested ways and means whereby Urdu poetry could be made more useful and serviceable to society. He did not stop at preaching only but put his precepts into practice as well. Three quarters of his *diwan* and most of his later poems can be quoted in evidence. There is no gainsaying the fact that he is the harbinger of the new *ghazal* and the movement launched by him has achieved far-reaching results. No

doubt, the initiative in this direction had been taken by his mentor Ghalib. Ghalib's pre-eminence lies, however, in the fact that he had introduced more philosophical themes like man, his aesthetic and psychological outlook, life and its deeper significance and the like in his poetry. In short Ghalib had for the first time given depth to Urdu *ghazal* to make it more interpretative of human life. Hali on the other hand made *ghazal* more pervasive. He enlarged its scope. He made it a vehicle of education and reform. This can be directly traced to the movement of Sir Syed in whose contact he had come in about 1875.

This revolutionary innovation of Hali raised a storm of protest all over the country. People who had been brought up in a fixed way of thinking could hardly reconcile themselves to Hali's ideas. So far the criterion of good poetry, particularly in the Lucknow school, had been the use of correct and chaste language and certain artificial verbal manipulations. Hali not only ignored these external embellishments, he actually preached against them. In his view the real beauty of a poem lay not in its form or verbal garb though this too was important, but rather in its underlying idea and the effect it would have upon the reader and the society at large in particular. No form of Urdu poetry—*ghazal*, *qasida*, *mathnavi*, *qat'ah*, *marthia*, etc.—has escaped his sharp critical eye. He has dealt in detail with everyone of them, highlighted their merits and deprecated the defects. He does not condemn outright any one of these forms. On the other hand he wants to make them more useful and harness them to the service of the society. He wants to retain them and has suggested a change in the outlook of the poet who writes them.

Even this limited improvement suggested by Hali did not meet with the approval of many critics. For months newspapers and journals continued publishing scathing criti-

cism of Hali. Supporters of Hali though not as vocal were not idle either. They withstood the onslaught and met the detractors on their own ground. What Hali had said was in fact the need of the time. For generations our writers and poets had moved in deep grooves and the door to new ideas and thoughts had been kept shut. Times had now changed. With India's contacts with the West and the spread of Western thought in the wake of English education the educated community in particular could not remain content with old ideas they had inherited from their forefathers. Time is the best judge. It has given the final verdict in favour of Hali and his thought. Today Hali has been accepted by one and all as the prophet of new poetry and a trend-setter in criticism. In fact, to have written such a lengthy Introduction to his *Diwan* in itself was a departure from the accepted practice. No one before him had ever thought of doing so.

### 'Musaddas-i Hali'

Sir Syed's concern for the welfare of the Indian people at large and Muslim community in particular is well-known. He had no doubt about the fact that most of the ills of his community could be traced to illiteracy and despondency about their future. He persuaded Hali to compose a poem which would awaken them out of their lethargy and enthuse them to new life and activity. The result was the famous *Musaddas* which till this day occupies a unique place in the whole gamut of Urdu poetry. He begins with the darkness and chaos that prevailed all around in pre-Islamic Arabia. Their idol worship, barbaric customs, petty quarrels, social evils and primitive inhuman habits have all been vividly described. This is followed by the introduction of Islam and its high moral pitch which goaded the backward and benighted



Arab society to feats of extraordinary valour and glory. For this he dilates upon the achievements of Muslims of yore and the lasting contribution made by them to world civilization and culture. He ends up with their present degradation and impotence which is the result of their having gone astray from the path chalked out by the teachings of Islam and their Prophet. He exhorts them to bestir themselves and mend their ways and return to the path of righteousness and morality.

The language used in the *Musaddas* is so simple and direct that the reader needs hardly ever halt anywhere to consult the dictionary. In fact, at places, Hali has used colloquialism as if two persons are talking to each other. The flow of the poem is like a torrent coming down a high mountain into the plains. Once it is begun the reader, if he is interested in the subject, cannot lay the book down without finishing it. When Hali sent a copy of the poem after it was first published in 1879 to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the latter wrote to the poet:

“I acknowledge the receipt of your kind letter together with five copies of the *Musaddas*. The moment it came to my hand, I couldn't put it down before it was finished. And when it was finished, I was sorry that it had come to an end. It would be proper to say that with this *Musaddas*, the art of poetry has turned a new leaf. The clarity and perfection and flow of the poem are beyond praise. It is amazing how a realistic subject devoid of all exaggeration and deviation from the truth or far-fetched similes which are in general the stock in trade of all poets, in fact of all poetry, could be treated with such beauty, eloquence and telling effect. There are a number of stanzas which cannot be read without moist eyes. It is but true that what comes out of the

heart impresses the heart.

"The prose piece is also very good and is in a novel style. Old style poetry has been satirized in a very interesting way. For reference made to me in this piece, please accept my thanks. This I take is entirely the result of your affection for me. If there is any trace of outdated poetry in this whole book it is this reference to me. No doubt, I had requested you to write this poem. And I consider this to be amongst my pious deeds. When God would ask me what good have I to my credit, I would say : I made Halı write the *Musaddas*, and nothing of merit have I done besides that.

"May God bestow His blessings upon you and may the people derive benefit from it !

"Leaders of prayers in the mosques should recite parts of the *Musaddas* in their prayers and their sermons.....

"I do not approve of your proposal to give the copyright of the *Musaddas* to the (Aligarh) *Madrassa* and that a deed to that effect should be registered. I sincerely thank you for this kind thought, though. But I cannot agree to any restrictions being placed on the publication of this *Musaddas*, which is a picture of our present-day society and is an elegy of its death (i.e , its past glory).

"Let it be published as widely as possible so that it is read extensively . . . this is what will give me the greatest pleasure. I wish I could convene a grand concert in Delhi which should be attended by the elite of the city. And dancing girls should dance in rhythm with the singing of this *Musaddas*." (10 June 1879).

This is a highly laudatory letter and reflects the sincerity of its writer. But it is also a true index of the

opinion of the intelligentsia of the time.

As said above the first edition of the poem was published in 1879. A reprint appeared the very next year in 1880. Later on, he enlarged the poem and added 162 new stanzas to it; some verbal changes were effected in the original text as well. This amended edition was first published in 1886 and is the basis of the poem as it is found today.

Musaddas is a fairly long poem and today more than a hundred years after its first appearance in print, we cannot adequately appreciate the effect it had on the reading public. The progressive elements applauded it and spoke very highly of both its form and content. But it did not escape adverse criticism either. The Lucknow school was particularly up in arms against Hali. Their attack was two-pronged one, on account of the language used by him; and two, on account of its content. Many poems and tracts were written and published by different authors decrying Hali's attempt at reform. The main opposition in reality emanated from the fact that he was a close friend and collaborator of Sir Syed's and he had written this poem at his instance. There was already a large section of Muslim community particularly its orthodox and tradition ridden segment which was opposed to Sir Syed's ideology and his *modus operandi*. Their opposition to Hali was, therefore, aimed at achieving a two-fold purpose. They thought they could kill two birds with one stone.

All this opposition achieved little. For a time it created a stir in the literary world but it gradually died down. People ultimately came round to recognise the intrinsic value of the poetic work and the permanent contribution that had been made thereby to Urdu literature.

Imitation is the subtlest and the most eloquent form of compliment. *Musaddas* was copied by two renowned poets to highlight the achievements of Hindus: one, Brij Narain

Dattatraya 'Kaifi' wrote *Bharat Darpan* also in *musaddas* form in Urdu; and two, Maithili Sharan Gupta wrote *Bharat Bharati* in Hindi (1912).

#### Four Lahore Mathnavis

We have seen how the new type of *Musha'ara* was started by Anjuman-i Punjab at Lahore in 1874. Muhammed Husain Azad was the moving spirit behind this bold and revolutionary step. Hali had readily participated in these monthly gatherings of the poets. Before his return to Delhi, he could participate in four such gatherings only. He presented four of his well-known *mathnavis* in these poetical symposia, viz (1) The Rainy Season (*Barkha Rut*), (2) Pleasures of Hope (*Nashat-i Ummid*), (3) Patriotism (*Hubb-i Watan*), and (4) Dialogue between Clemency and Justice (*Munazara-i Rahm-o Insaf*). These poems, quite obviously, were written to order. Production of this type always suffers from lack of spontaneity and flow. The author has to labour and the result is more often than not artificial and insipid. All the same though themes were proposed by others, poetry had essentially to be the product of Hali's inner thoughts and result of his experience and observations. There were scores of *mathnavis* written by Hali's predecessors and some of them are considered masterpieces till this day. But invariably they dealt with either a love theme or such topics which verged on the supernatural and superstitious. Lahore *musha'ara* was primarily convened to reform this trend and we can confidently say that Hali's contribution in this field immensely helped to bring Urdu poetry down to earth and nearer our daily life bereft of all unscientific elements. These *mathnavis* are not only good pieces of poetic craftsmanship but also true pictures of our everyday life, natural feelings and aspirations. Encouraged by their success, Hali wrote

several other *mathnavis* in later years maintaining therein the excellence of language and style, and a high standard of thought.

A collection of 14 poems, including the Lahore compositions, was published by Hali himself under the title: *Majmu'a-i Nazm-i Hali* in 1890, i.e., even before the publication of his *Diwan*.

### Hali, the Biographer

The credit of writing the first scientific biographies in Urdu goes to Shibli. His *Sira-tul-No'man* (1894) and *Al-Farooq* (1896) were published in his lifetime ; and *Sira-tun-Nabi* (1918) posthumously. The subject of these biographies was religious or pseudo-religious. Hali widened the scope. His first attempt in this field was when he edited the travels of Hakeem Nasir Khusrau 'Alavi, the eighth century poet-scholar of Iran. He added a comprehensive Introduction to it in which a full biography of the author was given. The original travelogue was in Persian, he therefore wrote his Introduction and the life of Nasir Khusrau also in Persian. He himself has mentioned that he had to labour a great deal to collect material for the life of Nasir Khusrau.

### 'Hayat-i Sa'di'

His first biography in Urdu was that of the great moralist, poet and philosopher Sa'di of Shiraz, entitled *Hayat-i Sa'di*. Sa'di has been accepted as a great moral influence not only in his native land but all over the world. And perhaps that is why his slim volume *Gulistan* began to be taught to students in their early formative years. Hali who was by nature a religious man and a reformer could not fail to make use of the life and teachings of Sa'di in his mission. He has not only collected biographical data from

scattered sources but also given a very balanced evaluation of Sa'di's two famous books · *Gulistan* and *Bostan* and dwelt upon their educational importance at length. *Inter alia*, he has dealt in detail with the history of Muslim literary achievements and social progress. In spite of the fact that nearly a century has passed since its publication, we have not had a better book on the subject till this day. Even Iranian scholars have recognised its merit; a good translation of it was published from Teheran quite some time ago.

### “Yadgar-i Ghalib’

His second monumental work in this series is the life of Ghalib. Ghalib was his mentor in poetry and he had had ample opportunities to meet the great poet in his lifetime. Unfortunately, Ghalib was denied his due place and recognition when alive. His contemporary critics short-sightedly did not realise what contribution he had made to the development of Urdu poetry and literature. Hali had witnessed that Ghalib had not only dauntlessly withstood the adverse criticism of his opponents but also had not deviated from the path he had set for himself. He, therefore, considered it a misfortune that on account of the denigration by a handful of opponents, people at large had been deprived of an opportunity to appreciate the greatness and eminence of Ghalib.

His ‘Elegy of Ghalib’ is a very moving piece. It is not only Hali’s masterpiece, but to this day one of the most sensitive and eloquent poems of its genre in the Urdu language. Friends pressed him to compile a biography of Ghalib. His preoccupation with other things, however, prevented him from undertaking this work early and it was ultimately published in 1897.

In the first part of the book, in about a hundred pages,

he has given whatever he could gather as regards the life of Ghalib. At many places we find lacunae and we wish that more details were available. Hali had been in close contact with Ghalib and was in a position to obtain first hand information and clarification of several points which are in doubt or dispute today. But then, in the lifetime of the poet, Hali could hardly imagine that one day he would be called upon to write his biography and therefore he should equip himself with all those details. There is another possibility also. Trends and modes of essential and non-essential contents keep changing in biographies as well as in other walks of life. What appears important to us today was hardly considered worth noticing in Hali's time. It is, therefore, likely that Hali did know the details of what we consider important, but he ignored them in the narrative of Ghalib's life.

Ghalib has been the subject of research by a large number of scholars during the past hundred years and more. Practically every event of his life has been uncovered and we have succeeded in enlarging upon what Hali had written in the first part of the book, yet it can be said without fear of contradiction that despite its various deficiencies *Yadgar-i Ghalib* still continues to be an indispensable account.

The really important portion of the book is its second part where he has evaluated Ghalib as an author, as a poet of Urdu and Persian and as a prose writer. This was a pioneering work and in fact, as Hali has said, in the Introduction, this was the main object of his writing this book. He wanted to highlight the supremacy of Ghalib in the field of literature. A good deal of research has been done about the life of Ghalib and any number of new facts have come to light. But hardly anything has been added to what Hali has written about Ghalib's literary merits. There

is no denying the fact that it was Hali who laid the foundation stone of the great edifice which today represents Ghalib's reputation as a poet. Every critic eulogises Ghalib and a libraryful of books dealing with his art and philosophy have been published. But it is difficult to imagine what Hali had to put up with going against the current at the time when Ghalib's pre-eminence was being disputed. And maybe this was one important reason why he had to delay his book.

Critical portion of *Yadgar-i Ghalib* was in fact a corollary of the thesis propounded by him in the introduction to his own *Diwan*. He applied the theories he had advanced there to the poetry of Ghalib and proved the progressive outlook of his master in the light of his own ideas. Ghalib was far ahead of his times and there is no doubt that on account of the inherent excellence of his poetry, he was destined in due course to be acknowledged as the foremost poet of Urdu language. But there is no doubt either that to bring him this popularity and acceptance by all and sundry, Hali's *Yadgar-i Ghalib* has played no small part. It was Hali who pinpointed the beauties of Ghalib and helped better understanding of what was hidden under the harsh garb of Ghalib's Persian-laden language and difficult diction.

## 'Hayat-i Javeed'

The last of the trio is *Hayat-i Javeed*, a life of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan. As we know, he had begun it during the lifetime of Sir Syed but could not complete it before his death in March 1898. It was first published in 1901.

All through his life, Sir Syed remained a controversial figure. On the one hand there were people who considered him a heretic and a renegade (*kafir*), the greatest instrument of corruption in Islam and a foe of the Muslims.



There were others who acclaimed him as the staunchest friend and defender of Islam and their benefactor. Not even his bitterest opponents however denied that in steadfastness and tenacity of purpose and strength of convictions no one could equal him.

Hali had known Sir Syed for a quarter of a century and their relations had been those of a master and a disciple. Sir Syed had played an important role in the development of his thought and crystallization of his ideas and ideology. They had closely collaborated with each other for the advancement of Sir Syed's projects and policies. In spite of the fact that Hali even earlier was no retrograde and had forward-looking tendencies, Sir Syed had definitely had a hand in promoting his progressive outlook in the field of education and social reform. When Sir Syed died, Hali first wrote a long elegy in Persian, which was published in May 1898, a couple of months after Sir Syed's death. This is probably his last major poem in that language in which he has compared him with great scholars and reformers of Islam, of the past. He applauded his services to the cause of Muslim community in India and his lifelong devotion to the advancement of his compatriots. He exhorted the companions and followers of Sir Syed to persevere in the path shown by the departed leader and leave no stone unturned to achieve his goal.

Later on at the instance of some friends he undertook to complete the biography of Sir Syed on which he had been working during the last years of the departed leader. It took Hali some seven years to complete it.

Hali has not endorsed every idea and every action of Sir Syed, at a number of places he has differed. He has nowhere blindly supported Sir Syed's conclusions in the interpretation of the Qur'anic text, for example. Where he has done so, he has juxtaposed the opinions of old commenta-

tors with the ideas of Sir Syed and then tried to argue the case in favour of one or the other. Whereas this method of treatment shows his impartiality and independence, it also is a clear evidence of his critical acumen which enabled him to adjudge between two conflicting points of view. The book was received by the public with mixed opinions. Some spoke very highly of it and others thought it was "a bunch of canards and inventions" or at best a "laboured rhapsody". Eighty years later we are in a better position to decide that this is probably the best biography in Urdu language. No author can do justice to the subject of his writing unless he is sympathetic to him and attuned to the same wave length on which his hero thought and worked. In this respect probably no one else was better entitled to write on the life of Sir Syed than Hali. Both of them had been close associates for about 25 years and Hali had seen how in the face of tremendous odds Sir Syed had never vacillated and ultimately reached his goal.

Sir Syed is a very difficult subject to deal with. He has so many facets to his personality. He is an author (prose writer), an educationist, an administrator, epigraphist and archaeologist, social reformer, scholar of comparative religion, a commentator of the Qur'an, politician, and so many other things besides. To do justice to such a complex personality, his biographer must have at least more than a mere passing knowledge of these subjects to be able to express himself about his success or failure in these fields. Despite all these hurdles Hali has acquitted himself admirably in this task.

Much literature, for and against, has accumulated around Sir Syed during the past 80 years and more. But it can be safely said that till this day *Hayat-i Javeed* remains from every angle the most complete and authentic biography of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan.

### Friend of Fair Sex

Hali had a very compassionate heart. Essentially he was a friend of the downtrodden and the oppressed. In our society of a century ago there was no one more suppressed and deserving of sympathy and consideration than our women folk. From her very birth a girl was considered a burden and an inferior member of the society. She was given education, if at all, just enough to acquaint her with the three Rs. Early marriage was the order of the day. And unfortunately many such marriages came to an abrupt end by the passing away of the boy spouse leaving behind a child widow. The society did not favour widow re-marriage though instances of such marriages were not entirely non-existent. It can be well imagined what miserable life such widows lived in a society which was not very well disposed towards women.

Hali had realised from the very beginning that if we were to progress we could not neglect half our population to remain illiterate and ignorant with no human rights and no hope for the future. Education, he correctly concluded, was the first essential ingredient if things were to improve. He began his crusade with his book *Majalis-un-Nisa* which he published in 1874 at Lahore. He got the cue for writing it from Nazir Ahmad who had written two similar books, viz., *Mirat-ul 'Uroos* and *Binat-un-Na'sh* for girls which were published in 1869 and 1873 respectively. Hali liked these books. He immediately realized the usefulness of this indirect approach to educate girls and provide them guidance for their future life. *Majalis-un-Nisa* is in two parts and the very fact that instead of giving each section the title of *baab* (chapter) he named it as *majlis* (sitting) shows what his object was in writing this book. In each chapter (*majlis*) he talks of a particular field in which women are going to be involved later on. For example, in

the first chapter he deals with the subject of education and its importance from the social and national point of view. In the second, he develops the theme of moral training that can be imparted to children in their day-to-day life. The third chapter deals with superstitions and futile and extravagant customs indulged in by our womenfolk; and so on. These are the topics, every one of us has to deal with in our daily life. Hali knew that a child's first school was his mother's lap. His character would develop according to the instruction he had received and the example he had seen in his early days from his mother. He, therefore, correctly thought of educating the mother so that the future generation could be set on the right path.

When he returned to Panipat in 1889 after resigning from his post at the Anglo-Arabic School, Delhi, he started a Primary School for Girls in Panipat. The School was located in a building contiguous to his own residential house. All physical amenities were provided to the students in accordance with the requirements of weather. A special lady teacher was engaged from Delhi. Unfortunately, this useful experiment was not continued by his friends and the school had to be closed down after a few years. But the very fact that he had thought of it shows his strong conviction and sincerity of purpose.

His poems *Munajat-i Bewa* (1884) and *Chup ki Daad* (1905) are two compositions also written with that end in view. The first is a verbal picture of the life of degradation a child-widow had to suffer a hundred years ago. The widow who was bereaved before she could even understand what marriage meant has expressed her inner thoughts and suppressed feelings in a language which could not be simpler or more effective. The reader cannot escape having feelings of pity and compassion.

This poem was highly appreciated and became parti-

cularly very popular in circles conscious of the social ills of our society. It was translated into ten regional languages including Sanskrit.

Situation has changed drastically. Child marriage is now prohibited by law. Widow remarriage has been legalised. Conditions have consequently improved to such an extent that *Munajat-i Bewa* will most likely be considered by some an outdated composition today. Nevertheless, its simple style and true-to-life description cannot fail to impress a sensitive reader.

*Chup ki Daad*. This medium-sized poem was first published in December, 1906 in the monthly *Khatoon*, Aligarh. It deals with the contemporary status of woman and highlights the sacrifices made by them, and the poor return they received for these. Fortunately, times were fast changing especially under the impact of western education and inflow of new ideas. It was being seriously considered by the educated classes that keeping our women folk devoid of education and knowledge was suicidal. The poem written by Hali in his usual straight and simple style was dedicated to Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum of Bhopal who was a great patron of female education and had contributed substantially towards the advancement of this movement.

## Conclusion

A study of Hali's life is very fascinating. He was born in a middle class family with a thoroughly religious background. His childhood milieu was such that not a ray of modern knowledge or science could penetrate the thick curtain. From worldly angle the family had come to such a pass that till the age of seventeen he could not be provided with any instruction except for what was available in a mosque. And what little knowledge he did acquire

later on, that too could only help him to become a hardened *mulla*, self-opinionated and self-righteous. Formidable handicaps, these. For a smaller man they could have proved insurmountable, indeed. How did he face the situation !

His first bold, rather audacious step, was to run away from home and thus set himself free from the stifling atmosphere, which would certainly have stunted his growth. Delhi helped him widen his horizon immensely. Here he came in contact, in different degrees of intimacy, with a large number of intellectuals. It is almost certain that he must have met Shaifia for the first time at Ghalib's place, which as we have seen later on proved very beneficial to him. The first real break came with his employment at Lahore. Although there is no direct evidence to that effect, still it can be safely assumed that he got this job through the intercession of Master Pearay Lal whose acquaintance again he most probably owed to Ghalib. From this point onward his rise was uninterrupted and steady. The contribution he made thereafter to the cause of Urdu and the pre-eminence he attained in his life time as a man of letters, no one could have anticipated. There are always some contributory factors for all great results and achievements. In Hali's case these are Ghalib, Shaifia, Lahore Musha'ara and Sir Syed.

Let us have a look at his services to the Urdu language and literature ! Take the Urdu language first. Here his distinct contribution is in the fact that he revived its popular and national character. This needs a little elaboration.

Although some half-hearted attempts had been made even earlier too, they had not gone far. A serious and deliberate effort was made by the veteran Lucknow poet Nasikh to purge the Urdu language of all its local voca-

bulary Hindi words generally and particularly those derived from Hindi roots were declared taboo and advisedly shunned and put out of use. In their puritanic zeal Nasikh and his coterie closed their eyes to the future. They failed to realize that their attempts to deprive the language of its local colour, if stretched to their logical end, were bound to impede its growth and make Urdu literature the monopoly of a few. Unfortunately, they succeeded in their efforts. The result was that our poetry which in any case had had very little contact with the masses lost its moorings completely. Its language and its diction, its similes and thought content—in general its whole atmosphere was surcharged with non-Indian elements.

In this depressing and wholly unnatural state of affairs, Hali struck a new note. He consciously used straight and simple language. This was the language of the people, which they spoke and in which they thought, and which they understood. That is why his poems have proved so successful. He has given expression to the common man's aspirations and sentiments in his own language.

Incidentally this was one main reason why most of the opposition to Hali came from Lucknow circles. Anyhow it was after this that our writers realized what harm the Nasikh School of thought had done to the language and its further progress.

As an artist Hali stands head above shoulders to most of his contemporaries and later day litterateurs. His contribution to the improvement of Urdu poetry, prose, criticism, and biography is so outstanding and of such high quality that his influence is felt to this day when western thought and associations have opened up many new avenues of progress. The reform movement in Urdu poetry was no doubt initiated by Holroyd and Muhammad Husain Azad; Hali himself has acknowledged this and paid handsome

tribute to both of them. But if we went back a little, we will realise that rebellion against the establishment was actually started by Ghalib whose pupil Hali was. If one were to study Hali's *Diwan* more carefully, he would find that even in his old style *ghazal*, Hali, like his master, seldom walks in the oft-beaten track. Except for a stray line here or there, he completely avoids the themes of which old Urdu poets were so enamoured. The Reform Movement of 1874, therefore, did not mean a new message for Hali. It merely meant that someone had articulated his nebulous thoughts which had been revolving in his mind for a long time. That is why he readily espoused the new movement and worked hard for the rest of his life to make it a success. One should give due recognition to the initiators of the scheme, no doubt. But can there be two opinions as to who deserves the credit for its success? From 1874 to 1914 when he died, for 40 years, Hali never, for a moment, lost sight of his objective to enrich and widen the scope of the language, to raise the standard of both its poetry and prose, to instil a sense of moral values in the minds of people, to put them generally on the road to knowledge and progress. How far did he succeed in attaining his goal can be seen from several volumes of works he left behind for posterity.



## Appendix

Hereunder is given a chronology of some important poems and publications of Hali which will help the reader understand the evolution of his art and gradual development of his mind.

- 1854-55    An Arabic pamphlet on a controversial theological theme (Lost)
- 1864       : *Maulood Sharif* (Account of the Prophet's Life)  
First published in 1923
- 1867       : *Taryaq-i Masmoom* (Antidote for the Poisoned)  
Rejoinder to 'Imad-ud-Din's book *Tahqeeq-ul-Iman* or *Hidayat-ul-Muslimeen* (Lost)
- 1869       · Elegy on Ghalib
- 1871       · *Usul-i Pharisi* (Principles of Persian). Probably a part of it had been completed; even this has been lost.
- 1871       · *Mabadi-i 'Ilm-i Geology* (Principles of Geology). Translation of an Arabic book which in itself was translated from French (Lahore, 1883)
- 1872       : *Shawahid-ul Ilham* (Evidence of Divine Revelation) (Lost)
- 1874       · *Majalis-un-Nisa* (Discourses for Women) I & II (Published in Lahore)
- 1874       : *Barkha Rut* (Rainy Season). Mathnavi presented at the first Musha'ara held on 30 May 1874.
- : *Nashat-i Ummid* (Pleasures of Hope). Presented at the third Musha'ara held on 3 August 1874.

## APPENDIX

- : *Hubb-i Watan* (Patriotism). Presented at the fourth Musha'ara held on 3 September 1874.
- : *Munazara-i Rahm-o-Insaf* (Dialogue between Clemency and Justice) Presented at the sixth Musha'ara held on 14 November 1874.
- 1879 : *Musaddas-i Madd-o-Jazr-i Islam* (Rise and Decline of Islam) : commonly known as *Musaddas-i Hali*.
- 1882 · : *Safarnama-i Nasir Khusrau* (Travelogue and Life of Nasir Khusrau 'Alavi)
- 1883 : *Phoot aur Eke ka Munazara* (Dialogue between Discord and Unity) *Mathnavi*
- 1884 · : *Munajat-i Bewa* (A Widow's Prayer)
- 1886 : *Zamima-i Musaddas-i Hali* (Addendum to *Musaddas-i Hali*)
- : *Hayat-i Sa'di* (Life of Sa'di)
- 1887 *Daulat aur Waqt ka Munazara* (Dialogue between Wealth and Time)
- 1888 · : *Shikwa-i Hind* (Complaint to India)
- : *Huqooq-i Aulad* (Rights of Children)
- 1890 : *Majmoo'a-i Nazm-i Hali* (A Bunch of Hali's Poems)
- 1891 : *Qaum ka Mutawassat Tabqa* (Our Middle Classes)
- 1892 : *Jashn-i Qaumi* (National Fête)
- Marthia-i Hakeem Mahmud Khan Delhvi* (Elegy of H. Mahmud Khan of Delhi)
- 1893 : *Muqaddama ma' Diwan-i Hali* (Introduction with *Diwan* of Hali)
- 1897 : *Yadgar-i Ghalib* (Memories of Ghalib)
- 1898 : *Marthia-i Sir Syed Ahmad Khan* (Persian) (Elegy of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan)
- 1901 : *Hayat-i Javeed* (Life Eternal)
- 1902 : *Maqalat-i Hali* (Essays of Hali)

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- 1903 : *Tuhfa-tul-Ikhwan* (Present for Brethren)  
1905 : *Chup ki Dad* (In Praise of Silence)  
1914 : *Zamima-i Urdu Kulliyat-i Nazm-i Hali/mushtamal bar Nazm-o-Nasr-i Pharisi-o-Arabi* (Addendum to Hali's Collected Urdu Poems consisting of Persian and Arabic Poetry and Prose)

The following books were published posthumously :

- 1922 : *Jawaharat-i Hali* (Gems of Hali)  
1925 : *Maktoobat-i Hali* (Letters of Hali)  
          : *Kulliyat-i Hali*  
1950 : *Makateeb-i Hali* (Letters of Hali)  
1967 &  
1968 : *Kulhiyat-i Nasr-i Hali, I & II* (Prose Works of Hali)  
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